ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

For

WALZEM TRACT
WALZEM ROAD & GIBBS SPRAWL ROAD
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS

Prepared for

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PSI PROJECT NO.: 435- 311

May 11, 2010

An Archaeological Survey of the Walzem Tract, Northeast San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

by
Harry J. Shafer and Thomas R. Hester

SUBMITTED TO

PSI
San Antonio, Texas

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ABASOLO ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTANTS
San Antonio, Texas

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Abstract

In May 2010, Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a survey of a 3.5 acre tract at the intersection of Walzem and Gibbs Sprawl roads in northeastern San Antonio. This fieldwork was done at the request of PSI, Inc. of San Antonio. No cultural resources were found and no further archaeological research is needed.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the 3.5 acre tract on Walzem Road in northeast San Antonio. We conducted a pedestrian survey to determine if any prehistoric or historic cultural resources were present on this property. The work was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places would be damaged or destroyed due to the planned construction.

The Setting

The project area borders Walzem Road on the north and Gibbs-Sprawl road on the east. Martinez Creek cuts through the southern portion of the property (Figs. 1 and 2). The property has been cleared in the past and at one time it had been in cultivation

Physiographically, the project area lies in the Blackland Prairie—or to be more specific the rolling hills of the Eagle Ford which is bounded on the northwest by the Balcones fault and on the southeast by the White Rock Escarpment. According to the United States Department of Agriculture *Soil Survey of Bexar County* (Taylor et al., 1966), the soils on the slopes of the creek valley in the project area are entirely dominated by the Houston Black clay (HuB 1-3), while Trinity-Frio (Tf) series occur along the narrow vegetation-choked floodplain and creek channel. The Houston Black clay characteristically has soils on 1 to 3 percent, and they contain chert-laden Uvalde gravels which constitute 3-60% of the matrix, depending on the slope and erosion (Fig. 3). The black surface layer changes to gray with olive-brown streaks. These lithic materials erode into the creek bed

forming gravel bars in the channel and along the floodplain. A pale brown calcareous clay or marl with mottles of olive brown and gray characterizes the deeper subsoil.

This stratigraphy is typical of the uplands of the Blackland Prairie (Taylor et al., 1966: 20-22)(Fig. 4). Floodplain soils belong to the Trinity-Frio series and Martinez Creek gravels consist of rounded limestone with an admixture of chert cobbles. The ephemeral nature of the upper or third-order streams provide an unlikely setting for extensive prehistoric campsites although the chert was exploited throughout prehistory. The fertile Blackland soils, however, made this area of Texas prime for early Anglo settlements, especially small family-owned farms in the post Civil War era. Urban expansion by the city of San Antonio, Converse and Universal City, and the construction of Randolph Air Force Base have encroached and absorbed virtually all of the small farms in eastern Bexar County.

Archaeological Background

Regional Chronology

The culture history of Bexar County covers the entire spectrum of time that human populations have inhabited the state. The earliest is the *Paleoindian Period* dating from 11,500 to about 9,000 years ago. Climate changes at the end of the Pleistocene (Ice Age) and growing Native American populations resulted in a greater emphasis on plant resources throughout much of the Holocene and the *Archaic Period* from about 9,000 to 1500 years ago. The bow and arrow was introduced into the area about 1300 years ago and was the hallmark the *Late Prehistoric Period* that lasted until the Historic or Contact Period when the Spanish entered the area about A.D. 1690. Archaeological sites dating to each one of these broad chronological periods have been recorded in Bexar County.

Archaeologists have recorded over 1700 archaeological sites in the county. One of the most significant prehistoric sites recorded thus far was Pavo Real (41BX52) located at Highway 1604 and Leon Creek. This site uncovered prehistoric occupation dating back to the Late Pleistocene Clovis period about 11,500 years ago (Collins et al., 2003). A significant Archaic Period site was located where Culebra Creek crosses Highway 1604

(Nickels et al. 1998). This site yielded information that dates back to 6000 years ago. Other important Archaic and Late Prehistoric sites have been investigated in the Salado Creek watershed (Black and McGraw 1985; Black et al., 1998). This brief review is presented to emphasize that artifacts from each of these time periods may be encountered as surface finds among the lithic resources along the upland drainages of the Blackland Prairies and in archaeological sites along the water ways in eastern Bexar County.

Nearby Sites

The Texas Archaelogical Sites Atlas lists several sites in the vicinity of the project area along Martinez and Saltrillo Creeks, including sites 41BX63, 318, 401, and 513. Site 41BX63 is located on a hill dividing Saltrillo and Cibolo creeks. No sides are found in proximity to the Walzem Tract. Sites 41BX318 and 41BX401 are listed as prehistoric chert quarries, and site 41BX513 located on Martinez Creek below Woodlake Golf Course is described as a "lithic resource area" according to the Restricted Cultural Resource Information (RCRI) file at the Texas Historical Commission. Another survey southeast of the project area on Escondido Creek recorded five archeological sites, 41BX1316, 41BX1317, 41BX1318, 41BX1319, and 41BX1320. Sites 41BX1316-41BX1319 are described as "lithic scatters." Site 41BX1320 was a 20th century farmstead. Also, Binz Engleman sites 1 and 2 (Shafer and Hester 2004) have been recorded within the proximity of the project. These sites are immediately south of 41BX513 along Martinez Creek. Binz Engleman Site 1 is also a historic homestead, and Site 2 is a prehistoric campsite (Trinomial numbers for these two sites are pending).

It is appropriate to address the resources found in the natural landscape along these headwater drainages in the Blackland Prairie. It is heavily littered with Uvalde gravels that contain excellent quality Edwards chert. As the soils erode, the lithic resources become more concentrated along the slopes toward the creeks. This the precisely situation that was observed in pastures in the Binz Engleman survey about three kilometers downstream from the project area (Shafer and Hester 2004). The sloping pasture land on both sides of Martinez Creek was littered with chert nodules, some of which exhibited testing and partial reduction by prehistoric flintknappers in search of

good quality lithic material. An occasional cortex or secondary cortex flake, core, or discarded early stage biface were noted (Shafer and Hester 2004: 3, 4).

A very similar situation occurs at Woodlake Golf Course just downstream from the project area where visibility permitted. The construction of the course altered the natural landscape considerably and has covered much of it with a grass for golfing purposes. Erosion exposures on the golf course along Martinez Creek were examined within and outside a sewer line project area to get a perspective of the geomorphic situation. These observations were made not just for this project, but also for future projects that are bound to occur in the rapidly developing areas along Martinez, Rosillo, Saltrillo, Escondido creeks, and other drainages.

Survey Results

Scattered mesquite and huisache and wildflowers covered the property at the time of the survey (Fig. 5). Despite the vegetation, surface exposure was about 50%, giving ample visibility to inspect the property for cultural resources. It was obvious that the land had once been cultivated, and possibly terraced, and the fallow field is now being reclaimed by the invader species.

As we noted above, various surveys along Martinez Creek have identified several locations of intermittent prehistoric chert resource exploitation. The Uvalde gravels that litter the surface of the Walzem tract, however, are generally small, fist-size or smaller, and are not particularly amenable to quarrying for stone tool production. The survey party did identify three tested cobbles, and one large flake—indicating that at some time in prehistory, an ancient toolmaker was indeed searching for suitable stone to shape. In sum, the survey party only identified a trace of prehistoric activity, and not at all sufficient to designate the area as an archaeological site.

The only other evidence of activity was illegal dumping of construction trash in scattered locations within the tract.

Summary and Conclusions

The pedestrian archaeological survey of the 3.5. acre Walzem property observed a surface littered with small Uvalde Gravels, and only a trace of prehistoric activity identified by three tested chert cobbles (tested for quality and rejected), and a single chert flake. **Since no significant cultural resources were identified in the survey, no further archaeological work is recommended.**

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Figures

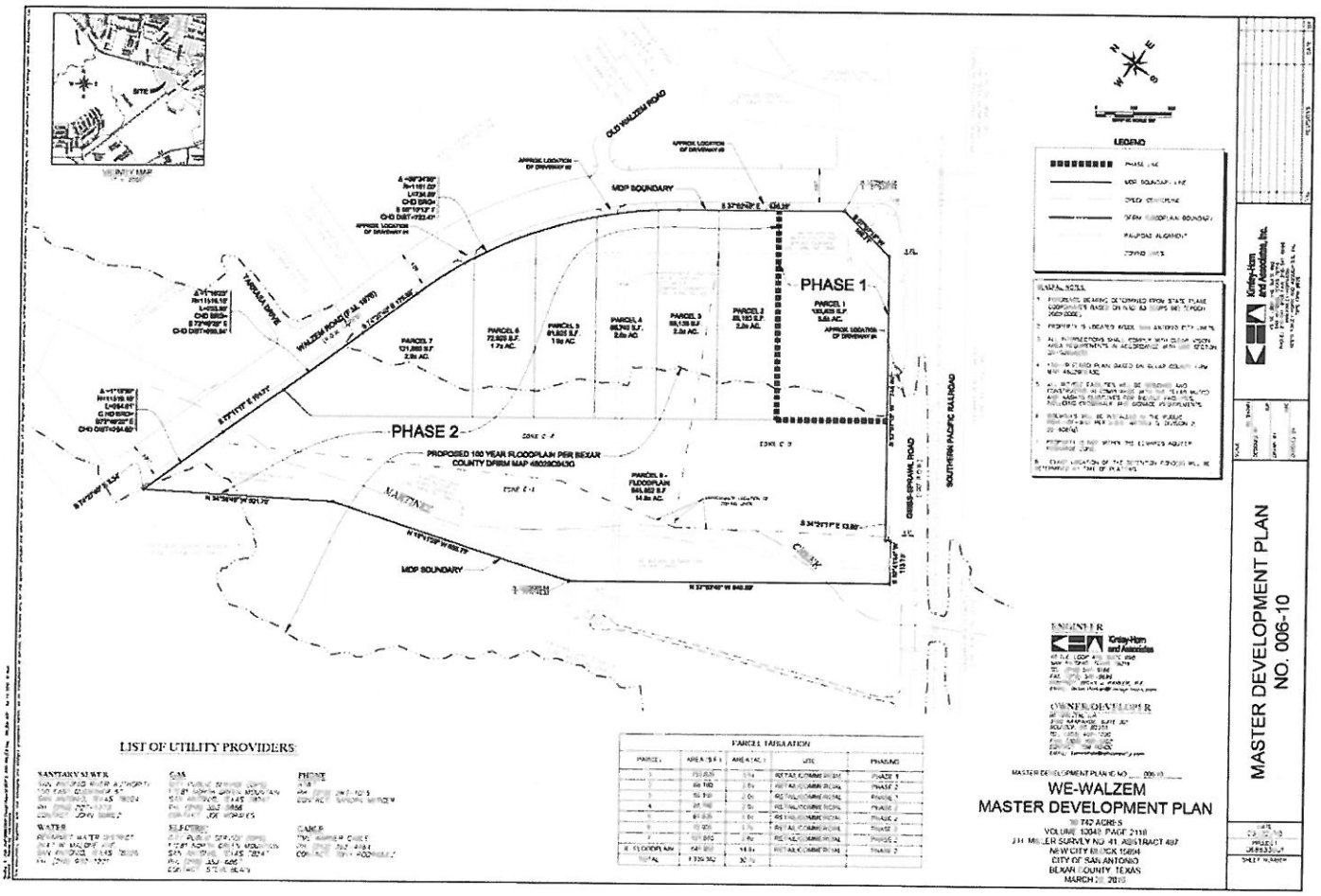

Figure 1. Plat map showing the project area at the intersection of Walzem Road and Gibbs-Sprawl Road, northeast San Antonio.

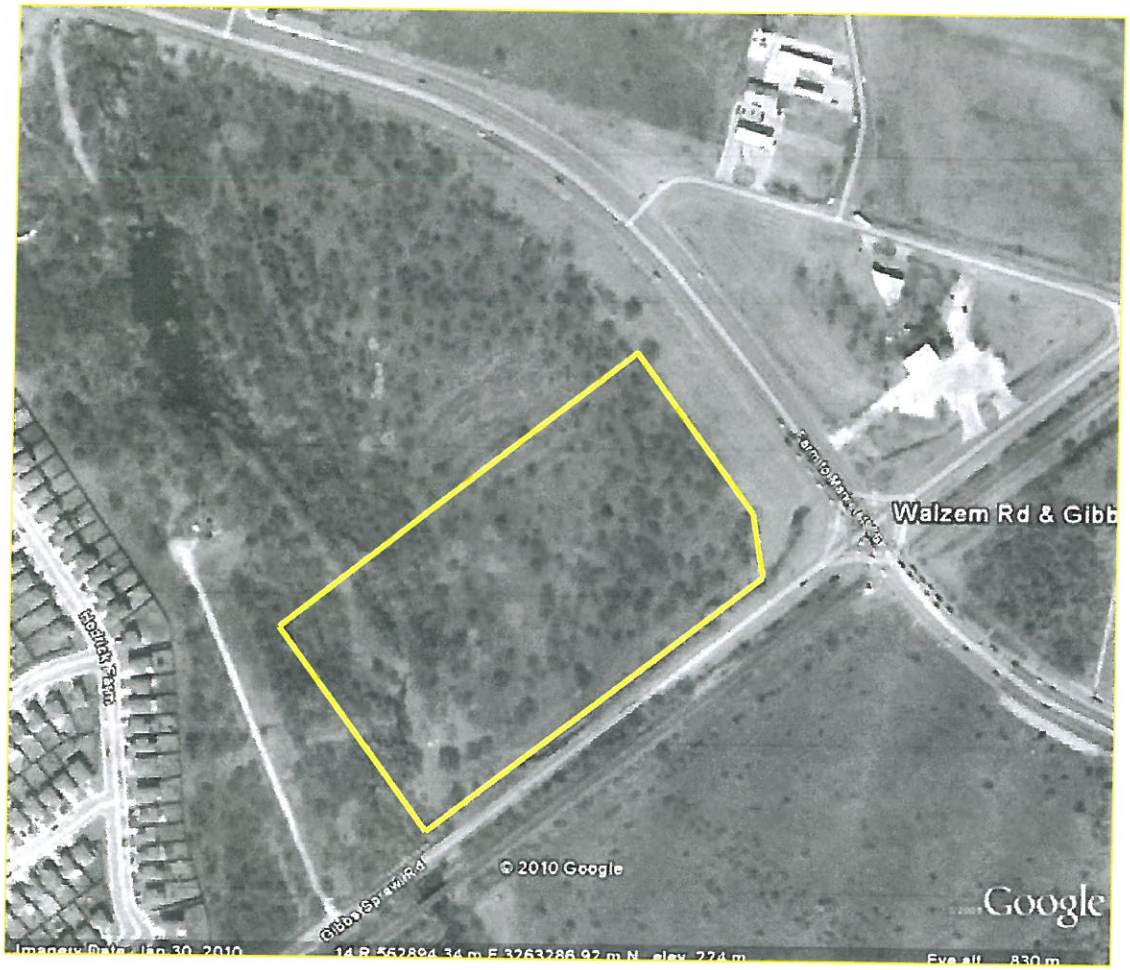

Figure 2. Google Earth aerial view of the project area.

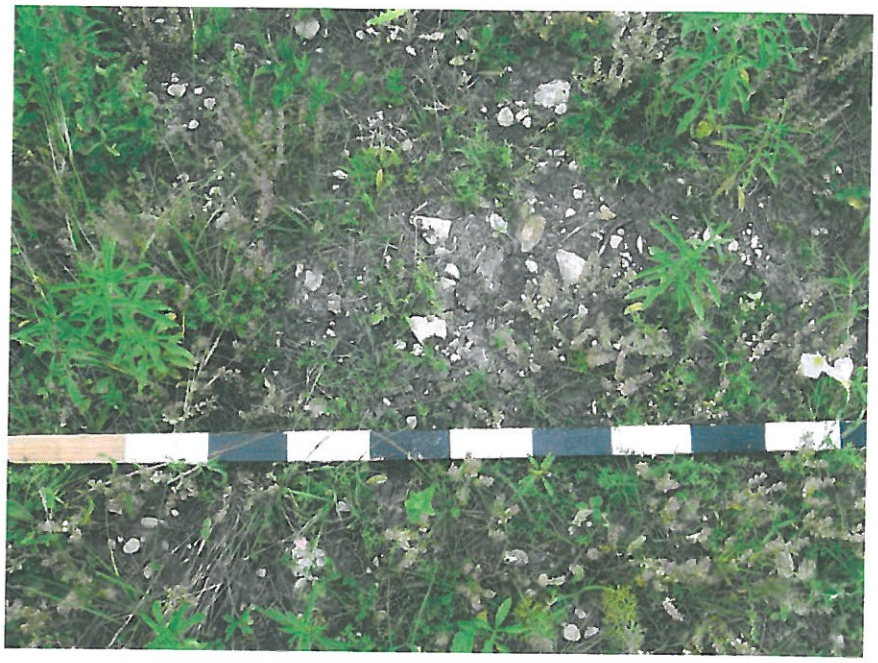

Figure 3. Surface exposure showing Houston Black clay and Uvalde gravels.

Figure 4. A faced-off animal burrow revealing the characteristic profile of Houston Black clay.

Figure 5. Views of the project area showing the spring wildflowers and other vegetation.